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Reviews

CUENTOS DE LA AMÉRICA ESPAÑOLA. Selected and edited with Notes and Vocabulary, by ALFRED COESTER, PH.D. Ginn & Company, Boston, 1920. V+236 pages (136 text, 21 notes, 76 vocabulary).

Professor Coester's book is the first collection of Spanish-American short stories to be published for school use, though a few have been included in "readers," or incorporated in collections of Spanish stories. The tales are suitable for third year in high school and second year in college. Since the recent awakening of interest in Spanish-American countries the tendency has been to emphasize the so-called "practical" by the publication of constructed material descriptive of these countries, or to teach their history by excerpts from Mitre, Vicuña Mackenna, etc. Professor Coester says in his preface: "Stories afford the best material for the study of colloquial speech, as well as for oral and reproductive exercises. Stories better sustain class interest than pseudo-travels or extracts from newspapers and histories." This is a psychological fact well-known to anyone who has tried to induce classes to read descriptions of battles and marches, or who has struggled through some of the travel dialogues above-mentioned. Moreover, many of the latter are anything but colloquial and do not teach Spanish as it actually exists.

A knowledge of Spanish-American history is certainly worth while, but its study furnishes a very poor medium for instruction in Spanish conversation. A student who lands in Buenos Aires will scarcely find it necessary to discuss the splendid heroism of San Martín, nor the political issues of Federalists and Unitarians, though he may wish to know how to manipulate a *bombilla* if he is invited to partake of the classic *mate*. As Professor Coester says further, stories, especially those of present-day life, will put the student in closer touch with local customs than anything else he can read. A foreigner studying English and contemplating a trip to the United States, may be thoroughly familiar with the story of Washington crossing the Delaware or the dramatic episode of Lee's surrender, and arrive in New York an utter stranger to every phase of American life and even unable to make himself understood in an ordinary restaurant. So the Spanish student may have read with interest a description of San Martín's heroic crossing of the Andes or the story of his famous interview with Bolívar and know absolutely nothing of the people he will meet in South America. The first story in Professor Coester's

book, *Cómo se formaban los caudillos* by Mansilla, will interest a student in the man Rosas, when he would be bored by a chapter from any history however well-written, and the bald statement "*ejerció durante 24 años una sangrienta dictadura*" (from a recent reader) would be forgotten the next day. Next to a personal acquaintance, the best way to know the people of any country is through the literary productions of their own writers.

Professor Coester's volume contains seventeen selections, representing nine different countries. The selections are well chosen with reference to diversity of style and to local color. Some of the leading writers of the several countries are included, such as Ricardo Palma, Blanco-Fombona, Señora Matto de Turner, Rubén Darío and Manuel Fernández Juncos. Others are of lesser note, some too recent to be well-known outside of their respective localities—Viana, for example, who is undoubtedly one of Uruguay's most talented writers. Mexico fares rather badly. The short story has been much in vogue in that country for over a half-century, and Mexico's greatest novelists have made excursions into that field. With a list of great names including Altamirano, Rafael Delgado, Portillo y Rojas, Federico Gamboa and Amado Nervo, it seems rather unfortunate to select as the sole representative of Mexico's great literature, a comparatively unknown journalist of over sixty years ago. Romero's little story *Anita* is interesting, however, and typical of the romanticism of his times, if not of the Mexico of to-day. It may be questioned whether anything is gained by retaining the Chilean spelling in the last selection (*Juan Fariña* by Baldomero Lillo). It is easily read after one knows Spanish, and may prove only needlessly puzzling to a high school or college student.

Cuentos de la América Española is excellent from a mechanical point of view, and the illustrations, both photographs and drawings, are well-suited to the text. A map of *La América Latina* precedes the notes. (Why not some other term? Perhaps Professor Coester endorses this, but some of us are fighting hard to keep our students from using "Latin America," though, with most departments of history against us, it bids fair to be a losing fight). The vocabulary is complete; the notes appreciative and entirely adequate, covering all historical and geographical references, as well as translating many difficult idioms. The text is remarkably free from typographical errors. In fact, the book is one of the very best edited texts with which we have been favored recently and it is welcome. It is to be hoped that it will encourage the study of the life and customs of the countries of Spanish America through their literatures, rather than by means of the more or less stilted texts constructed by American teachers.

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